



Gravenhurst Public Library Strategic Planning for 2015 to 2017

Summary of Results from Community Survey Responses and Focus Group Discussions Completed May and June 2014

Introduction

In the fall of 2013 the Gravenhurst Public Library Board made the decision to work towards the development of a strategic plan to provide directions for library operations for 2015 through to 2017. In January 2014 a special adhoc committee of the Board was formed and tasked with putting together the process necessary for the creation of a three year strategic plan. As gathering feedback from community residents is one of the key elements of building such a plan the committee determined a community survey and focus group discussions would be used.

A survey was developed and disseminated both in a printed format and as an online form from the end of April to May 30, 2014. The number of surveys completed during this time was 315. In terms of those who completed the survey, 213 were permanent residents, 17 were seasonal/weekend residents and 2 were visitors. 83 did not respond to this question. Board members and library staff had an opportunity to review the raw results of these surveys when these were sent out in June.

During the months of May and June five focus group sessions were held to discuss questions pertaining to the relevance and value of the library to the community of Gravenhurst. Four of the discussion groups were made up of a mix of library users and non-users, all who live in Gravenhurst, totaling thirty participants. These discussions were facilitated and recorded by people from the community rather than staff or board members. The fifth focus group was made up of eleven staff members and was facilitated and recorded by the library's CEO / Chief Librarian.

This summary was created to provide GPL Board and staff members with a high level overview of what emerged as central themes from the survey and focus group feedback. In part this document has been done as preparation for the strategic plan working session to be held on September 4, but it was also compiled to provide support for directions once these have been fleshed out in the three year plan.

Emergent Central Themes

From the feedback provided through the survey responses and the focus group discussions seven central themes emerged. These were: collection, accessibility, awareness, engagement, programming, staff and use of space.

COLLECTION

According to the feedback provided by respondents borrowing books was the most popular reason for using the library (87.5% of survey respondents). Other significant reasons to use the library relating to the collection included borrowing: DVDs (rated second to books), magazines, Kobo readers, e-books, and audio books. Appreciation for the creation and expansion of the e-book collection was also expressed by respondents. Reading magazines and newspapers in house as well as using the library for research and study (74% of survey respondents) were repeatedly mentioned. The Muskoka history collection was pinpointed as a highly valued resource. The interlibrary loan service was also selected as a reason for using the library and comments reflected how much people appreciate this service (66% of survey respondents).

Some of the feedback, however, did include concerns about specific areas of the collection. Respondents felt that areas such as the non-fiction collection have been neglected and are outdated whereas other areas like the magazines have been over weeded. A suggestion was made to do a review of the library's collections to determine what areas are in need of the greatest attention. Space constraints continue make the practice of weeding necessary and perhaps the purchase of e-book titles can help fill the void.

Areas of the collection respondents would like to see expanded include:

- non-fiction
- magazines and newspapers
- best sellers
- e-books
- audiobooks for children
- iPads for loan
- genealogy resources
- DVDs - especially British series
- missing series titles

ACCESSIBILITY

Upon reviewing the feedback from the surveys and focus group discussions the need for ensuring library resources are physically, virtually and financially accessible arose as a major themes.

Physical Access to Resources

With the aging population of the community, it was stressed that making the library more physically accessible should be a priority. For instance, several respondents mentioned the need for more prominent and descriptive signage in the library. This

included signage for check in and check out, the inside book drop, the stairwell, and the lift detailing who can use it and when. Better signage for the non-fiction section was also requested. It was suggested that a floor plan or map be created denoting each area of the library.

Several respondents commented on how they would like to see the lift made more accessible or be replaced with an elevator. Another suggestion was made to have moveable chairs with wheels or lightweight seats available for those who have difficulty standing for long periods but still wish to browse the shelves.

An appreciation for access to resources such as e-book readers, e-books, and audio books was expressed especially as this pertains to those with vision, hearing and mobility issues. Here is one striking comment made by a respondent: "I use my Kobo for all reading now as holding books open to read bothers my hand and elbow." By making e-readers and e-books available the library can have a positive impact on the quality of this person's life.

A number of respondents to the survey selected longer hours as a change they would like to see at the library. Comments were also made during focus group sessions regarding the expansion of library hours to improve accessibility. Suggestions for opening earlier each day, on Friday evenings, longer on Saturdays and during the day on Sunday were all put forward.

Virtual Access to Resources

Having free access to computer workstations, internet and wifi was mentioned numerous times as a central reason for visiting the library (67% of survey respondents). Feedback regarding the computer, internet and device training done as part of the programming at the library was also very positive. Training on how to download e-books and audio books was selected as being especially popular and people would like to see this kind of training continue in the future.

"Libraries must be the linchpin in all communities to provide training and access to how we use our information. No other community resource is better suited to deliver that." – Survey Comment

Some feedback, however, did reflect the need for more user-friendly access to the library catalogue and online resources. Some of the comments included: the website for interlibrary loan requests is difficult to use; the search function in the online catalogue needs to be improved; HIP should be replaced with Bibliocommons; notification of holds and overdue items could be emailed; the "my account" part of the website needs to be more user friendly; and wireless printing in the library is needed. One other suggestion was made to investigate how to tap into gigabyte transfer speeds associated with the main trunk high speed line that exists or is still to come. Another idea was to create a virtual 360 degree tour of the library and put this on the website.

The Library is Financially Accessible

Some people providing feedback did highlight the financial value of using the library. Using the library's collection, services and programs can save people money and this keeps them coming back. One comment made was: The library "... is one of the few places where parents are not asked to buy something."

When people need to pay fees or fines, however the library does not facilitate any other methods of payment outside of using cash. A few comments were made about having debit and credit transactions available or being able to pay through one's library account online.

AWARENESS

Another major theme that arose from the community consultation was the lack of public awareness of resources and services the library currently has available. Better promotion and marketing of what the library has to offer was cited by numerous survey respondents as well as focus group participants. The areas that need awareness include:

- one-on-one and group computer training
- Library Elf service
- public meeting room availability and rental rates
- digital resources
- new resources – want to "see" more books when coming into the library
- teen area
- interlibrary loan service
- wifi access
- Kobos available for check out
- Exam proctoring

Some people commented on the Library Link articles published in the newspaper and expressed these are well done and useful. Others had suggestions for the use of social media to promote library offerings including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. It was mentioned that a digital display be mounted at the front entrance of the library with rotating messages and information about library resources, services and events. Books displayed "face up" on shelves like those found in bookstores would also catch attention. The better collection of statistics on how many people use the library as well as how they use it would assist with measuring the impact of any kind of public awareness campaign.

ENGAGEMENT

Finding more ways to engage and interact with the public was also a central theme. The idea of the library being a community hub and a place where partnerships with other community organizations flourish was cited as key to the library's current and future success.

Since the library is a gathering place and is centrally located in Town of Gravenhurst it is in a good position to help enhance the community it serves. One focus group

participant stated, "We are losing the ability to talk, communicate. Libraries can help fill this void." Another library user wrote, "Libraries should be the heart of the community. An area to gather that is neutral." Phrases like "a haven", "a community hub", and "a public square" were used when describing the library. The library as a place where people feel comfortable sharing thoughts and ideas with others is a concept central to why libraries were first established. Another person stated that, the, "Library is NOT an underutilized service but a very busy place."

Some of the suggestions made to better engage people included the development of a monthly newsletter to be emailed out to those who have provided permission; an emailed list of what's new at the library based on a person's preferences; materials designed to promote resources for adult learners; and eye catching or thoughtful displays done with the assistance of local organizations.

Partnerships with other institutions, agencies and organizations were highlighted as a way to increase awareness of the library as well as generate community engagement.

The library is one of the first places travellers step foot into when they visit Gravenhurst, it acts as an entry way and provides a first impression to visitors of the community. Cottagers also make heavy use of the library during the summer months. Keeping up with the demands of summer visitors who are familiar with the offerings of libraries in larger centres needs to be kept in mind. Partnerships with tourism outlets and cottagers' associations could be looked into.

Another partnership mentioned repeatedly in the results was with the local high school. Suggestions were made to work with high school administration to provide volunteer opportunities for students ex. theatre arts students could volunteer to entertain at the library. The idea of going into the kids' space at the school to build a direct relationship was mentioned.

Developing partnerships with seniors' organizations, and literacy and employment agencies were also highlighted by the results. A roving collection that could move from location to location around town; satellite libraries at the farmer's market and seniors' residences; and a book boat that would serve cottagers were also suggested. 63% of survey respondents would like to see expanded outreach services for seniors.

Comments were also made about the archives association and the invaluable research resource the archives represents. The work of archives volunteers was acknowledged and is much appreciated. Concerns regarding a small budget, the need for promotion and the lack of space were expressed. Access to digitized archival records was repeated as a suggestion in the feedback.

PROGRAMMING

Programs held at the library, especially the children's programs offered throughout the year, were mentioned numerous times as a reason to use the library (65% of survey respondents). Parents and grandparents make heavy use of children's programming. Adult programming such as the needlework and book clubs, the Travel the World Series and the free tax clinics were also cited as being popular.

Suggestions for possible future programs made by respondents included:

- creative writing workshops
- regular art club for kids
- painting pals for adults
- teen programming
- book talks by staff and/or local authors
- interactive virtual courses
- genealogy club
- horticultural society talks
- living library
- human book event
- programming that involves partnerships
- more evening programs for adults

STAFF

Throughout the results the library's staff received very positive comments on their performance. GPL staff members are thought of as knowledgeable, friendly, and helpful. It was made clear that the public really appreciates when staff members go above and beyond (87% of survey respondents).

From the results it would appear that the public prefers to consult with staff members in person rather than using the online catalogue. This is especially the case with reading preferences and book suggestions.

Some respondents would like to consult with library staff more often. One respondent stated they want, "More interaction between staff and clients. I'd like to feel free to call upon staff to interact, assist, recommend but they are usually preoccupied in the main office." This resonates with other survey responses and some of the comments that came out of focus groups. Juggling the provision of public service and other important tasks associated with operating the library means staff do have to spend time working away from the desk. Having staff well trained in areas such as technology and customer service were also mentioned as important.

USE OF SPACE

Last but not least, another theme arising from the survey results and the focus group discussions was the use of space at the library. In general positive comments were made about the attractiveness of the building, the fact that there is good parking and that the library is centrally located.

Several suggestions were made, however, to make the interior more visually appealing, more comfortable or provide better functionality for the space. Here are the most repeated responses:

- replace outdated colours on walls of library
- develop outdoor reading area
- create quiet comfy reading lounge (77% of survey respondents)
- purchase of additional task lighting to add warmth to reading areas, SAD lighting for use during winter months
- replace wingback chairs with something more up to date/ modern
- install water fountain (very popular idea)
- move more adult material on to main floor for parents accompanying their children or move portion of children's area upstairs
- create more of a separation between teen area and computer workstations
- install plugins and electrical outlets in teen area
- provide better access to Muskoka history collection behind workstations
- delineate areas for talking/ computer use and areas for research/reading
- place tabletop next to photocopier
- reconfigure circulation desk to remove bottleneck
- provide more comfortable seating and eating area in staff lunch room
- install proper task lighting and review functionality of desk and storage space in staff workroom
- expand programming room – concerns expressed with the multipurpose use of the room, its not always accessible or set up for outside parties to use, people using other resources on main floor sometimes find programming activities to be disruptive
- expand the building
- as physical collection grows areas are looked at for repurposing and space will become more crowded. Drastic weeding of the collection is not a long term solution.

Conclusion

This document was an attempt to consolidate the community survey and focus group feedback as well as highlight the more common themes that arose from the feedback. Some suggestions were also included that may have only been mentioned once. These were captured in this document to provide support for larger themes or because it was felt they were significant in some way.

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